

"SHALL THE BRONX BECOME A COUNTY?" EVERY BRONXITE ANSWERS "YES" OR "NO"

All Other Questions Have Been Sidetracked in the Region North of the Harlem, Where a Fierce Contest Is Being Waged to Establish a New System That Will Make the Borough More Independent of Manhattan.

As a County Many New Offices Would Be Created Involving an Outlay of at Least \$347,000 a Year, but Projectors of the Bill Say That It Would Be More Than Made Up For in Increased Facilities.

Opponents of the Measure Point Out That the Main Supporters of the Bill Are Those Who See in Its Passage a Lot of Patronage on Which They Will Keep a Clutch—Referendum Vote Will Be Taken Tuesday.

Happening to a coast on the public streets of the Bronx a registered voter, you might ask him what he thought of the chances of Roosevelt, and he would probably reply, "Roosevelt—Roosevelt—he's the man who was shot, isn't he?" And of Wilson or Taft said voter would probably remark, "Wilson! Taft! Seems to me I've heard those names before." He might know that Hedges and Straus and Sulzer are running for Governor, but he wouldn't be interested enough to mention it.

However, he would be sure to mention the burning question in the Bronx. This question stares at visitors and residents from every billboard and shouts at all readers from every page of the Bronx newspapers. It is flashed on the screens of the moving picture shows and forms part of the remarks of every monologue performer in the vaudeville theatres. Here is the question:

"Shall the territory within the Borough of the Bronx be erected into the County of the Bronx?"

The high cost of living, the slowness of the Third Avenue "L" express, the crowded condition of subway trains, building statistics and the alien population, long the favorite subjects of conversation in the Bronx, are now in the discussion discard. The county matter dominates every assemblage of from two persons to 2,000 from Chason Point to Riverdale, from Willis Avenue Bridge to Woodlawn Gate.

The residents of the Bronx are to vote next Tuesday on the matter of whether they shall become residents of a new county or continue as residents of New York County. Polls taken by persons interested in booming the new county project show that the vote in the affirmative will win by about three to one. A newspaper poll taken last week indicated a victory for the county project by a vote of about three to two. Even the opponents of the plan admit that the vote will be very close.

ABOUT 80,000 VOTERS CAN PASS ON IT.

The Bronx has a population of approximately 500,000. There are some 84,000 registered voters in the Borough and it is anticipated that close to 80,000 votes will be cast in the election. Usually not more than ten per cent of the registered vote in any community is cast on a constitutional amendment. It is estimated that the vote in Bronx Borough on the county question will approximate one-half of the total—an unprecedented percentage.

There is organized non-partisan effort to boom the Bronx County project and organized non-partisan effort to discourage it. Numerically the active boomers are a way in the majority, but the opposition is strong in money and influence, being largely made up of extensive property interests. Briefly stated there are just two points of opposition to the plan to make the Borough of the Bronx a county.

First—That it will result in an increase in the tax rate and raise rents.

Second—That it has been promoted by a coterie of politicians to create hundreds of county offices which will add politicians have arranged to annex to their own profit.

All minor considerations are covered by these two objections. Primarily the question of cutting 44 square miles of territory off the northern end of New York County and forming of that territory a new county is one of expense to tax payers and voters.

There is a political side to the controversy between the advocates and opponents of the plan, but the main issue is one of money. Will Bronx County cost more than Bronx Borough? Figures to prove that it will and to prove that it will not have been shot back and forth until the people of the district between the Harlem River and the Westchester line are dizzy.

FUSION ALWAYS DOWNS TAM MANY THERE.

The Bronx is a big, growing, hustling division of the City of New York. In population it is exceeded by only three counties in the State—New York, Kings and Erie. Normally Democratic, the Tammany ticket has always been beaten in the Bronx by Fusion.

The population is largely made up of persons who have moved beyond the Harlem from the lower end and the west side of Manhattan. Thousands of these changed in economic station from rent payers to property owners when they crossed the Harlem. The change made them independent in politics and they are generally influenced in voting by the interest that is the most potent with the tax payer—that is the cost of this, that or the other public project and how is this cost to affect the tax rate.

At the present time the Bronx, as a Borough and a part of New York County, has the New York County tax rate, \$12. The rate in Kings County is \$11.75, in Queens County, \$11.73, and in Richmond County \$11.81. It is claimed by tax payers of the Bronx that they are assessed at a higher percentage of the value of their holdings than are the property owners of Kings, Queens and Richmond. Both the advocates and opponents of the county plan agree on this.

The Bronx has about one-tenth of the population of the city and pays about one-ninth of the taxes. The assessed valuation of the property in the Bronx is approximately \$621,000,000. To patrol her forty-four square miles of territory and protect her population

of 500,000 the Bronx has only 600 policemen. Her residents are compelled to resort largely to the private patrol system of protection.

AWAY BEHIND ON PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES.

There are sixteen school sites in the Bronx awaiting school buildings and 2,000 school children in the Bronx on part time.

The Concourse, the park system and the boulevard system of the Bronx are practically completed, but there is a big expense in sight for sewers, street openings, grading and curbing in the undeveloped sections. This latter, however, will fall on the property owners whether the new county is formed or not.

Dry statistics are those set forth above, but they are necessary to an understanding of the situation, in that they show what the Bronx is, what it pays and what it is worth in real property.

The figures also show that the Bronx is inadequately policed and has inadequate school provision. In addition it may be stated that the Bronx has been practically overlooked in the matter of street cleaning and could easily accommodate a great deal more fire protection.

With the exception of the North Side Board of Trade all the civic associations in the Bronx of any strength or standing are in favor of the Bronx County project. The Taxpayers' Alliance, composed of the various property owners' associations of the borough, has come out for the county project, as has the Bar Association. The most active force in forwarding the movement for a separate county is the Bronx County Voters' League, which has offices in the A-Re-Co Building, at One Hundred and Forty-ninth street and Third Avenue.

In this connection it may be stated that the A-Re-Co corporation, which has large holdings in the Bronx and thousands of tenants, is opposed to the county plan.

ALL CANDIDATES BUT ONE IN FAVOR OF IT.

With one exception all the candidates for the Assembly and Senate on all tickets are for the county project. The exception is Ernest E. L. Hammer, the Democratic candidate for the Assembly in the Thirty-fifth District. Among the candidates who are working hard for the success of the county movement are Senator Stephen Stilwell, who introduced the County bill in the Senate and raised it; Senator Stilwell's opponents, William J. O'Gorman, Bull Moose, and

money and effort into the fight against the county bill. Hundreds of landlords have announced to their tenants that if the county bill goes through rents will be raised at once. The Bronx is daily inundated with literature from the opposition, mostly unsigned. This literature has been checkmated to some extent in its effect recently by the fact that its recipients have generally been held up for one from one to two cents excess postage on each piece delivered.

BOARD OF TRADE DIVIDED ON THE QUESTION.

As for the North Side Board of Trade with its five hundred members it is split on the county question. J. Harris Jones, the president, has lined himself up with the opposition and has been doing effective work. Members of the association who are in favor of the county plan are preparing an attack on Mr. Jones on the ground that he has gone beyond his powers as president of the North Side Board of Trade in committing that body against the county plan without a vote of instructions from the members.

George W. Perkins is against the county idea. In this connection the men who favor the plan assert that Mr. Jones is on record as not knowing where he lives. Mr. Perkins in an interview about a month ago said he had registered in the city of Yonkers when as a matter of fact he had registered in New York County.

The Riverside and real estate corporation opposition has been active ever since the project first came up in decisive form. At the joint legislative hearing in Albany last winter Robert E. Simons, a son-in-law of Henry Morganthau, whose holdings, unimproved and improved, in the Bronx are enormous, spoke against the Stilwell bill. Mr. Simons said he represented the quality, not the quantity of the Bronx, and he hasn't been any too popular with the "quantity" ever since.

On the question of expense the fighting forces are widely divided in their figures. The opposition brings statistics to show that the expenses of the present borough form of government will run along just the same with the expenses of the county government to be borne in addition by the taxpayers.

The Stilwell bill creating Bronx County, which is to be indorsed or repudiated on Tuesday, provides for officials with salaries amounting to \$197,500, but makes no provision for clerks, stenographers or help of other kinds to be supplied from the Civil Service lists. It is estimated by the Senator and his fellow boomers that the additional expense through the Stilwell bill. Mr. Simons would make the total pay-roll from the start—or January 1, 1913, when the new officials are to take their jobs if the bill passes—total \$247,500.

ADVOCATES SAY IT WILL COST LESS THAN IT DOES NOW.

The advocates of the bill claim that Bronx County at the present time is contributing \$408,500 toward the expense of running New York County, and that the payment would be cut off and a saving of the difference between \$408,500 and \$247,500, or \$161,000, would be accomplished. The opponents of the bill boldly claim and say they can prove it, that the \$247,500—which they do not admit will nearly cover the direct expenses of the new county—will have to be added to instead of subtracted from the present expenditure of \$408,500. On this particular point the ardent advocates of both sides froth from the mouth and call each other fools.

The advocates of the bill point out that the law provides that all public building improvements, such as courthouses, jails, halls of record and the like, will be paid for by the city. The Bronx will pay her share, they claim, of the cost of the new courthouse in Brooklyn and of the new municipal office building and the new projected court-house in Manhattan.

"Why not?" they ask. "Let Manhattan

and Kings and Queens and Richmond chip in and help pay for the new courthouse that will be necessary if we get our Bronx County?"

The county plan boomers admit that taxes may go up a trifle when the bill goes through, but predict that under a county form of government taxes would go down. They also predict that rents would go down instead of rise, for rents in the Bronx are higher now than in Queens or in Richmond. Here is the argument of Edward Polak and W. C. Berken on that point. Mr. Berken is one of the heaviest taxpayers on improved property in the Bronx, and has built nearly 1,000 houses in that territory.

THE SMALLER THE UNIT THE MORE ECONOMICAL.

"The smaller the unit of government, the more economical its administration. With our local officers right here under our eyes we could enforce economy."

"Our State tax remains the same whether we are a county of our own or a part of New York County. Our proportion of the expense of running the entire city remains the same, except that with a Bronx County we cut out the assessment upon us for our share of running the County of New York, with its army of Supreme Court judges and clerks and attendants, its immense District-Attorney's office, with its Thaw trials and Molnau trials and Patrick trials and Becker trials, its extravagantly expensive County Clerk's office and Sheriff's office and its intricate and expensive Surrogate's and Register's offices."

"If it doesn't cost us any more to conduct our affairs as a county our taxes can't go up, unless taxes go up all over the city for city improvements. And rents have nothing to do with tax rate."

"Richmond County has the highest tax rate and the lowest rents in the city."

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Queens has the next highest tax rate and the next lowest rent rate. Rents are regulated by the law of supply and demand. The landlords don't fix the rents. Rents are fixed by the tenants. If they won't pay or can't pay the rent demanded by one landlord they will rent from another landlord.

"When there is a surplus of renting accommodations rents go down and a scarcity of renting accommodations brings rents up. That is all there is to the question. Taxes in the Bronx are going up and rents are going down. During the boom days taxes were lower and rents were higher."

The political side of the question is of importance. The men who favor the Bronx County plan admit that and say that even though the county will create many new offices, the benefit will accrue to the people and not entirely to the officeholders.

FEW PLUMS HANDED OUT IN THE BRONX.

The Bronx was first annexed to New York County in 1874, and has been a part of New York County ever since. In those thirty-eight years but three Bronx men have held a county office. Henry D. Purroy was County Clerk, John R. Rorer was Register and Frank Gass was Register.

As a county the Bronx would have eight or nine Assemblymen and three Senators, instead of five Assemblymen and two Senators. And the Bronx as a county would count as a unit in the selection of candidates for office instead of being the tail of the New York County kite, as at present.

For instance, the Bronx, as a political division of the Greater City, would be in position, by making a combination with Manhattan as against the other counties, or with the other counties as against Manhattan, to demand a nomination on each political ticket. Now the Bronx cannot demand it.

Bronx County could demand the nomination of a Bronx man for Comptroller or President of the Board of Aldermen. Each of these offices has three votes of the sixteen votes in the Board of Estimate. At present the Bronx has but one vote in the Board of Estimate—that of the Borough President. As a county she would have a total of four votes and be in a position to form some combinations for the Bronx.

The opposition submits figures showing that the cost of a District-Attorney's office and a system of county courts and Supreme courts in the Bronx would be enormously expensive. The advocates of the plan admit that there would be some expense, but claim the expense would be more than made up by the convenience the residents of the Bronx would enjoy by having their courts right where they live.

NO REPRESENTATIVE ON THE IMPORTANT TAX BOARD.

The Tax Board is at present made up of two members from Manhattan and one member each from Kings, Queens and Richmond. Under the county plan, the Bronx would have a member of the Tax Board on the job all the time, and this is admitted by the opposition.

The condition of the Bronx with the election only five days away is pretty conclusively set forth in this article. It is up to the voters to decide. A great mass meeting was held in Niblo's Garden to forward the county movement last night, and the boomers say the meeting is an absolute indication that the bill will go through with a whoop. Inasmuch as the

public in nine cases out of ten votes in the affirmative on a measure dealing with such things as constitutional amendments or special laws, the chances favor the passage of the bill, but the opposition is putting up a stiff battle, and the feeling among a representation of the big property owners in the Bronx is very bitter against the innovation.

As a matter of fact, the Bronx is a county now. Senator Stilwell's bill, passed on April 9, formed the County of the Bronx, and provided that the county officers of New York County should have jurisdiction in the territory above the Harlem pending the indorsement of the bill by the people. If such indorsement is forthcoming the County of the Bronx will at once come into full existence, but without any officers.

These officers must be chosen at a general election. The next election will be held in November, 1914, and if the Bronx secedes from New York County and goes away by herself she will elect judges, sheriff, register, surrogate, district attorney and other officers at that time. But she will still be a growing and important part of the city of New York.

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